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ACTION		DIRECT REPLY		PREPARE REPLY	
APPROVAL		DISPATCH		RECOMMENDATION	
COMMENT		FILE		RETURN	
CONCURRENCE		INFORMATION		SIGNATURE	
Remarks: In regard to our meeting with Mr. Helms at 4 o'clock on 12 December, we have prepared two options relating to a letter the DCI may wish to send to the President concerning the OXCART/SR-71 matter. These first draft copies are being sent to the Acting Deputy Director for Science and Technology, the General Counsel and the Acting Director of Reconnaissance, CIA, for review and comment. We purposely took two approaches to the problem to enable recipients to consider alternative approaches. <div style="text-align: right; margin-right: 100px;">[Redacted Signature] John Parangosky</div>					
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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

DRAFT
BYE-2915-66
Alternative A
14 December 1966
Copy 1

The President
The White House
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. President:

I am deeply concerned as a result of a meeting in which I recently participated with Mr. Cyrus Vance of the Department of Defense, Mr. Charles L. Schultze, Director of the Budget, and Dr. Donald F. Hornig of your staff. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss and conclude upon recommendations with regard to the future of the OXCART (A-12) covert photographic reconnaissance program.

During the course of these discussions, a poll of the participants revealed that a majority of the group was in favor of phasing out the OXCART program. In fact, I cast the lone dissenting vote. It is my understanding that a recommendation that the OXCART program be phased out will be forwarded to you by the Director of the Budget in the near future. While I am prepared, as always, to accept and expeditiously implement any decision you reach, I earnestly solicit your consideration of the factors upon which I base my dissent to this course of action.

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I was, admittedly, somewhat surprised at this consensus because I am acutely aware of the almost universal conviction within the intelligence community that the manned reconnaissance collection capability represented by OXCART is essential to the future fulfillment of high priority intelligence requirements of national interest.

Although there is some persuasive argumentation that there are alternative capabilities which are adequate substitutes for OXCART, I am firmly convinced that failure to maintain this demonstrated asset, which has been nurtured to a state of operational readiness (evaluated and declared operationally ready in December 1965) over a period of eight years and at considerable financial cost, would leave a significant gap in the national photo reconnaissance inventory. The projected savings which might result from termination of the program may prove to be more illusory than tangible. The extensive investment which has already been made in the development of the aircraft and support facilities, both in this country and overseas, must be balanced against the relatively small savings that could be realized by abandoning the project at this time.

The basic issue, simply stated, is whether a U.S. civilian agency manned covert aerial reconnaissance capability is essential for the future fulfillment of high priority national intelligence requirements. I submit,

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without equivocation, that it is. Those who advocate termination of the OXCART program have argued that this covert mission can be as effectively accomplished by the Air Force (SR-71), as by CIA. This line of reasoning suggests that there is no significant difference whether the aircraft is piloted by a single civilian pilot or a military crew of two and little difference whether the missions are operated by the CIA or the Air Force.

In response to this hypothesis we necessarily lean heavily on the experience derived from the U-2 program. It is assumed that the political philosophy which guided the evolution of U-2 operational concepts, as well as program management, has not altered significantly with the passage of time and is as equally valid for OXCART today.

As you are aware, one of the basic factors upon which political approval rested, when U-2 overflights of the USSR were first undertaken in 1956, was our ability to offer to the President the means whereby this vital intelligence might be collected without placing the United States in a posture wherein the USSR or others could accuse the United States of an act of pure military aggression. Obviously, a very fundamental ingredient in achieving this capability was the irrefutable fact that the pilot was a civilian employee of an Agency whose business was espionage. This policy also applied to countries other than the USSR which were subjected to covert

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overflight. The policy has been reaffirmed on several occasions in the intervening years by your predecessors as well as the Chairmen of the House Armed Services Committee, the House Appropriations Committee, the ranking minority members of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and the CIA Congressional subcommittee. I am not aware, Mr. President, that you have ever expressed any views to the contrary.

In essence, the logical conclusion depends mainly on the question of covert versus overt operations, and the political ramifications that pertain to each type of operation. We are of the opinion that once you inject the military element, e. g. an Air Force crew, the operation is no longer a truly covert collection effort but rather a military activity which should properly be conducted by the appropriate military service. It is further believed that CIA civilian sponsorship clearly identifies the mission as non-aggressive and permits plausible description of its nature as defensive rather than offensive. In addition, unlike the military, CIA controls no nuclear weapons, which rules out any propaganda suggestion that an irrational act by some subordinate commander might precipitate a nuclear war.

In a very practical sense, we have learned from experience that CIA sponsorship in the case of a protest of a successful overflight permits the U. S. military commander in the area to truthfully state, after investigation,

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that no military aircraft were involved and to deny any knowledge of the flight without fear of subsequent exposure.

The rationale which dictates the use of a civilian CIA pilot for overflights of denied areas leads directly to the question of program management. There appears to be no practical means of severing operational control of such programs from the management and developmental aspects of the activity. I will not dwell on the detailed security measures which have been evolved by this Agency to protect these operations from public exposure. It is most unlikely that the Air Force could duplicate these procedures which are uniquely associated with Agency operations. Suffice to note that these rather complex, but essential, procedures contribute materially to increased protection of the mission itself, and a greater facility in denying overflights even though they have in fact occurred.

In addition, there are a number of special procedures which have been developed by CIA to further the objectives and effectiveness of the covert overflight program. For example, the Agency has over the years developed a highly sophisticated analysis and personal evaluation program for selection of psychologically adapted individuals to perform overflights. It has also conceived and implemented a sound program for indoctrination and psychological preparation of the individual in the event of capture under

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these very unique circumstances. CIA also takes stringent measures to compartment and limit knowledge of the individuals as soon as they join the project. It is doubtful that the Air Force could duplicate these programs and procedures.

From the operational standpoint, in ten years of CIA management and control of U-2 overflights in all parts of the world (435 overflights of approximately 30 denied countries) there has been only one incident which resulted in genuine embarrassment to the United States Government, this being the loss of a U-2 over the Soviet Union in May of 1960. This rather remarkable record was not established by happenstance; rather it is the product of the entire concept of the CIA operation, including meticulous security, judicious mission planning and timing, specialized maintenance by expert contractor personnel on long-term assignment, careful development of plausible cover stories and detailed contingency planning (including world-wide coordination and authentic documentation) to eliminate or minimize the harmful effects of an incident or mishap.

The picture is not complete without some reference to accomplishments in the field of aircraft and systems improvement and development. Over the years there have been many innovations to improve the performance, versatility and defensive capabilities of both the U-2 and the A-12, among

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them the introduction of higher thrust engines, in-flight refueling, advanced electronic countermeasures systems, new camera systems, carrier capability, personal equipment, etc. With few exceptions, these innovations and improvements were initiated and developed by CIA. In several cases, particularly in the electronics field, these new equipments have subsequently been adopted by the Air Force and the Navy and are being widely utilized in combat aircraft today.

If the OXCART program is terminated, it is virtually certain that the motivation and inspiration which led to these past accomplishments will be severely diminished for the future.

Another factor which cannot be ignored and which has direct influence on the prospects for future covert overflight operations, is the recognized reluctance of third countries to provide support, e.g. staging bases, when the operation is military in nature. Traditionally, they have been more willing to approve and cooperate in these activities when they are sponsored by CIA.

As a possible compromise arrangement, it has been proposed that if the OXCART program is terminated we might maintain within the SAC (SR-71) organization one or more CIA civilian pilots who could, if the requirement arose, be employed for covert overflight in an unmarked SR-71. This proposal assumes that in the event of mishap CIA would accept

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responsibility for the flight. I do not consider this hybrid expediency to be workable or realistic from either a security or a management standpoint, and I would be reluctant to engage in such an arrangement because of the potential embarrassment which could result to the United States Government.

In conclusion, Mr. President, I recommend that the OXCART program be continued in its present form, at least until such time as the SR-71 has demonstrated a capability to perform covert overflights. Unlike the OXCART (A-12) the SR-71 does not have such a capability today and it does not appear likely to reach that stage of development for many months to come. The operational readiness date for the SR-71 has been postulated on the assumption of rapid solution to current technical problems and we are not really certain when this will be achieved. Only when the SR-71 demonstrates a favorable comparability to the A-12 would I encourage a reexamination of the A-12 phase-out in terms of potential monetary savings to the government. In such an eventuality I would still envision the sharing by the Air Force of SR-71 assets with this organization so that a covert capability under the management and control of the Central Intelligence Agency could be maintained.

Faithfully yours,

(Richard Helms)

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

DRAFT
BYE 2915-66
Alternative B
14 December 1966

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: The CIA High Performance Mach 3 Reconnaissance
Aircraft (A-12)

1. You will be receiving a paper from the Director, Bureau of the Budget, recommending discontinuance of the A-12, Mach 3, reconnaissance aircraft program now managed and operated by the CIA.

Before you make your decision, I want to bring to your attention the events leading up to this recommendation and the reasons for my firm dissent.

2. For your information, the following background preceded the development of the A-12: In order to satisfy the national need for collection of photographic intelligence of the Soviet Union, the Central Intelligence Agency had, in December 1954, initiated development and operation of the U-2 aircraft after having received Presidential approval. This development was a joint program under Agency direction, but with the full support and participation of the Air Force. The Bureau of the Budget

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agreed to Agency contracting and management of the program, after the Air Force acknowledged that the CIA could almost certainly achieve a greater degree of security in procurement and operation than could the Air Force. Overflight of the Soviet Union commenced in July 1956; after thirty successful missions (providing the U.S. with its only extensive photographic coverage of the Soviet Union up to that time), the Soviet overflight activity was terminated with the loss of Powers' aircraft in May 1960. Anticipating the improvement in Soviet defenses, the CIA, again with Presidential approval, had already embarked on the development of an extremely advanced aircraft system, to be capable of evading known and postulated Soviet defenses by high speed, high altitude and low radar detectability. Following a design competition between General Dynamics and Lockheed Aircraft, a contract was awarded to Lockheed in February 1960, for the design, development, production, and test of the A-12 single place, Mach 3 aircraft for covert peacetime reconnaissance. Based on the A-12 development, the Air Force later procured thirty-two, two-place follow-on post strike reconnaissance aircraft (SR-71) for SAC, and three advanced interceptors (YF-12), with similar performance goals.

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3. Because of the ever-present need for reduction of expenditures, the Bureau of the Budget, CIA, and the Department of Defense undertook a joint study of the CIA A-12 and Air Force SR-71 programs in September 1966. This study group presented three options for consideration:

I. Maintain the status quo for both the civilian A-12 and the military SR-71 fleets, as currently programmed and budgeted at about 1,377 million dollars through FY 72.

II. Mothball the ten aircraft CIA A-12 fleet and share the thirty aircraft SR-71 fleet between separate CIA and Air Force contingents, at an estimated savings of about 252 million dollars through FY 72, i.e., continue both a CIA and Air Force operational capability but with the SR-71 military aircraft and at such time as the SR-71 demonstrates operational readiness.

III. Mothball the CIA A-12 fleet in January 1968 and assign all missions, both peacetime and wartime to the Air Force, at a savings of about 365 million dollars through FY 72.

4. On 12 December 1966, I met with Dr. Donald F. Hornig, Mr. Cyrus Vance of the Department of Defense, and Mr. Schultze, Director of the Budget, to discuss the proposed options. I dissented

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from the conclusion reached by them, which recommended Option III:
termination of the CIA A-12 program by January 1968 and assignment of
all missions, both peacetime and wartime to the Air Force.

5. My dissent is based on my firm belief that you should have
the option now and at any future time to call on a demonstrated civilian
(CIA) reconnaissance capability to perform peacetime overflight missions.
My rationale is as follows:

a. The CIA A-12 aircraft represents a proven capability.

This fleet which now includes eight operational aircraft was
declared operationally ready in December 1965 after an exhaustive
flight demonstration and reliability program. It has been maintained
on a ready status since then. This program has accumulated
over 300 flight hours at speeds of Mach 3 and above. Deployment
and operation in the Far East can be accomplished within fifteen
days of your direction. A decision at this time to terminate the
A-12 fleet, even though programmed to occur after the expected
operational readiness of the SR-71 would be disastrous to the
continued operability of the A-12 during the interim period.

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b. The SR-71 aircraft are currently restricted to speeds below Mach 3 because of technical problems associated with the extreme temperatures involved. The effect of these temperatures are aggravated by design differences peculiar to the SR-71. The Air Force estimates that this follow-on, larger, and heavier SR-71 aircraft will approach the A-12 in performance and will be operationally ready in August 1967. This performance and readiness, however, are postulated on the assumption of rapid solution to current technical problems. Therefore, we do not really know when the SR-71 will be operationally ready, or ever compare favorably with the performance of the A-12.

c. A CIA flown, operated, managed, and directed aircraft operation continues to be preferable over denied areas. While the civilian would be charged with espionage in the event of capture, a military pilot in similar circumstances would probably provoke the charge that the United States had committed an act of war.

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d. A civilian Agency operated aircraft and program flown by civilian pilots, provides the only basis for friendly and neutral nations to maintain a "no comment" posture or morally and covertly to support our intelligence collection efforts without indorsing manifestly military operation in the event of an incident.

e. It is difficult, if not impossible, to forecast all the considerations which you, as President, must evaluate at the time of a particular crisis; the lack of an option to utilize a bona fide civilian capability would seriously restrict the latitude of your choice, particularly in peacetime or an escalating situation. As amply illustrated by the U-2 Powers incident, the verifiable nature of civilian Agency directed operations is of great importance in calming fears of military aggression. The civilian nature of the undertaking must be verifiable at all levels, as the truth of the matter rapidly comes to the surface even with the best contrived cover stories; in other words, the so-called "sheep dipping", where military pilots are merely taken out of uniform and made to look like civilians is inadequate, particularly in the event of a peacetime international incident. To ask the CIA to assume

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public responsibility in this situation would invite the embarrassment which would result on exposure of the truth, with the inevitable impact on public opinion both at home and among friendly and neutral nations.

f. Chairmen Rivers, Vinson and Mahon, as well as other members of congressional committees, have flatly stated their view that only the CIA could conduct such a development program and maintain its secrecy, and have indicated they did not believe any other agency could securely conduct an operational program of sensitive peacetime overflights of hostile territory. They have recognized the A-12 capability as an asset for national intelligence which they do not believe should be controlled by the military.

g. The cognizant congressional subcommittees have been thoroughly briefed on the civilian status of the pilots in the A-12 program and, of course, were also briefed on the civilian status of the pilots in the CIA U-2 program. There seems to be a continuing acceptance and recognition of necessity for a civilian pilot in such circumstances as against a member of the military in the event of capture over denied territory. The distinction

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between the military overflights of Cuba and Viet Nam as opposed to civilian overflights of other areas of the world was clearly accepted.

h. The view of the Congress as a whole, as well as the CIA subcommittees, on the question of the effect of an overflight and shoot-down of an airplane with a military pilot versus civilian should be taken into account. I feel certain that the general view remains that the civilian would be the least dangerous and cause less adverse U.S. public and world reaction.

6. In conclusion, I recommend that the OXCART program be continued in its present form, at least until such time as the SR-71 has demonstrated a capability to perform covert overflights. Unlike the OXCART (A-12) the SR-71 does not have such a capability today and it does not appear likely to reach that stage of development for many months to come. The operational readiness date for the SR-71 has been postulated on the assumption of rapid solution to current technical problems and we are not really certain when this will be achieved. Only when the SR-71 demonstrates a favorable comparability to the A-12 would I encourage a reexamination of the A-12 phase-out in terms of potential monetary

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savings to the government. In such an eventuality I would still envision the sharing by the Air Force of SR-71 assets with this organization so that a covert capability under the management and control of the Central Intelligence Agency could be maintained.

Richard Helms

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